

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
MARCH 7, 2023  
MINUTES**

Fairlee Town Meeting was held in the Town Hall Auditorium on Tuesday, March 7, 2023. 94 voters checked in at the door. Total number of voters on the checklist was 772.

Moderator Bruce Taylor called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Article 1. To elect a Moderator, for one year

Dan Ludwig nominated Bruce Taylor for Moderator one year. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Bruce Taylor, Moderator for one year.

The Moderator suspended the rules for some housekeeping items. He asked if a Veteran would like to lead the flag salute. No veteran came forward so Clyde Blake volunteered to lead the voters in the Pledge of Allegiance.

He then introduced our State Representative Monique Priestley. Representative Priestly addressed the voters with information on her 2023 town meeting report hand out, her work in the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development, and the Rural Caucus Committee, which she serves as Clerk. She invited the voters to visit with her at the State House and to join her the third Sunday of every month at the Colatina Exit in Bradford from 12-1pm and on ZOOM from 5-6pm. She was given a round of applause.

Article 2. To hear and act upon the Town Officers' Reports.

Thomas Hough made the motion to move Article 2. The motion was seconded. There was no discussion. The question was called. The motion carried. Article 2 passed in the affirmative.

Article 3. To elect all necessary officers of the Town and to fill terms of any office that may be vacant, including:

- Selectboard Member, for three years
- Town Treasurer, for three years
- Lister, for three years
- Auditor, for two years
- Auditor, for three years
- Budget Committee Member, for two years
- Budget Committee Member, for three years
- Planning Commission Member, for four years
- Cemetery Commissioner, for five years
- Library Trustee, for five years
- Recreation Council Member, for one year
- Recreation Council Member, for one year
- Recreation Council Member, for two years
- Recreation Council Member, for three years

Timothy Danen nominated Catherine McGrath for Selectboard Member for three years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Catherine McGrath, Selectboard Member for three years.

Dan Ludwig nominated Lisa Hinsley for Town Treasurer for three years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Lisa Hinsley, Town Treasurer for three years.

Noel Walker nominated Russell Collins for Lister for three years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Russell Collins, Lister for three years.

Gene Ordway nominated Sandra Smith-Ordway for Auditor for two years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Sandra Smith-Ordway, Auditor for two years.

Being there were no nominations for Auditor for three years, and with unanimous consent, the Moderator passed over this office.

Dan Ludwig nominated Richard Kenney for Budget Committee Member for two years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Richard Kenney, Budget Committee Member for two years.

Dan Ludwig nominated Adam Stewart for Budget Committee Member for three years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Adam Stewart, Budget Committee Member for three years.

Smith Reed nominated Lynne Fitzhugh for Planning Commission Member for four years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Lynn Fitzhugh, Planning Commission Member for four years.

Charles (Chaz) Hinsley nominated Chad Pierson for Cemetery Commissioner for five years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Chad Pierson, Cemetery Commissioner for five years.

Cyrie Lange nominated Diane Sherman for Library Trustee for five years. There were no other nominations. Motion was made, seconded, and voted in the affirmative for the Clerk to cast one ballot for Diane Sherman, Library Trustee for five years.

Being there were no nominations for Recreation Council Member (2) for one year, (1) for two years, and (1) for 3 years, and with unanimous consent, the Moderator passed over these offices.

Clyde Blake explained how he had once served on the Recreation Council, but now it was getting harder to fill these positions with voters. He suggested that the Selectboard appoint these positions instead of them being elected.

Article 4. To see what action the Town will take with regard to the following appropriations. All sums have been included in the Town Budget. A sum not to exceed:

- a) Five Hundred dollars (**\$500**) to the **American Red Cross** for disaster support (CO)
- b) Three Hundred dollars (**\$300**) to **Capstone Community Action** for fuel, food, and housing assistance to families (CO)
- c) Four Hundred dollars (**\$400**) to **Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Inc.** for adult education and literacy instruction for residents of Fairlee (CO)
- d) Six Hundred dollars (**\$600**) to **Central Vermont Council on Aging** for senior services including a helpline, transportation, and meal delivery (CO)
- e) One Thousand Five Hundred Forty-Five dollars (**\$1,545**) to **Clara Martin Center** for counseling services (CO)

- f) Two Hundred Fifty dollars (**\$250**) to **Cohase Chamber of Commerce** for membership (CO)
- g) Fifty dollars (**\$50**) to **Green Up Vermont** (CO)
- h) Five Thousand Two Hundred Fifty dollars (**\$5,250**) to the **Lake Fairlee Association** for milfoil eradication program (CO)
- i) Two Thousand dollars (**\$2,000**) to **Little Rivers Health Care** for insurance and medical assistance including mobile dental van (CO)
- j) Five Hundred dollars (**\$500**) to the **Mentoring Project** for young persons (CO)
- k) Three Hundred fifty dollars (**\$350**) to the **Orange County Restorative Justice Center** a cost-effective alternative to the criminal court system for eligible offenders (CO)
- l) Three Thousand dollars (**\$3,000**) to the **Orange East Senior Center** for providing meal and social services at the center (CO)
- m) Seven Hundred Fifty dollars (**\$750**) to the **Rivendell Recreation Association** to provide elementary sports and recreational activities (CO)
- n) Four Hundred Fifty dollars (**\$450**) to the **Rivendell Trails Association** for trail maintenance, hikes, and education (CO)
- o) Seven Hundred dollars (**\$700**) to **Safeline** for a hotline for crisis support and referral services (CO)
- p) Two Thousand Five Hundred dollars (**\$2,500**) to **Tri-Valley Transit** for transportation of seniors, persons with disabilities and commuters (CO)
- q) Three Hundred dollars (**\$300**) to the **Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired** for services including rehabilitation, orientation and mobility, assistive technology, social networking, and statewide transportation (CO)
- r) One Hundred Fifty-Five dollars (**\$155**) to the **Vermont Center for Independent Living** to help Vermonters with disabilities by providing the Meals on Wheels Program, Peer Advocacy Counseling Program and information and referral services (CO)
- s) One Hundred dollars (**\$100**) to **Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force** to support Rural Fire Protection Program (CO)
- t) Two Hundred Fifty dollars (**\$250**) for the **Vermont Family Network** for providing support to all Vermont families of children with special needs (CO)
- u) Five Thousand Five Hundred dollars (**\$5,500**) to the **Visiting Nurse Alliance of VT and NH/Hospice of the Upper Valley** for home health care and hospice support services to individuals and their families (CO)
- v) Four Hundred Dollars (**\$400**) to **WISE**, an organization dedicated to supporting people and communities impacted by domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking (CO)
- w) Two Hundred dollars (**\$200**) to **Orange County Parent Child Center** helps families with young children through advocacy, support, wellness opportunities (CO)

Dan Ludwig made the motion to accept Article 4 in its entirety. The motion was seconded. Article 4 was opened for discussion. There was no discussion. The motion carried. Article 4 passed in the affirmative.

Article 5. Shall the voters of the Town of Fairlee authorize the Selectboard to accept and administer any Federal, State, or private grant money?

Clyde Blake made the motion to move Article 5. The motion was seconded. Article 5 was opened for discussion. Thomas Hough questioned the need of this article, presuming the Selectboard already had this authority. The Moderator explained that since it was an article in the warning it needed to be voted on regardless. The question was called. Article 5 passed in the affirmative.

Article 6. To act upon the Recommendations of the Budget Committee as they pertain to Highway Expenses and to appropriate a sum of money for Highway Expenses.

Elizabeth Wilson made the motion to appropriate the sum of \$301,472.00 for Highway Expenses. The motion was seconded. Article 6 was opened for discussion. Bob Maddock questioned the storm water mitigation project and the sidewalk project. He believed the State should take care of the storm water since Route 5 is a state highway and added that the sidewalk proposal was a poor design. Selectboard Chair Peter Berger explained that the \$175,000.00 for surface water mitigation on Route 5 was coming through the Better Connections Grant. He went on to add, even though the State owns Route 5, the surface water is a Town issue and that VTrans has accepted the plan. He added that the surface water is also an issue for business owners and a safety issue for pedestrians. Chris Cook questioned the upkeep on the sidewalk. Dan Ludwig added that he understood there would be no maintenance on the sidewalk in the winter. Selectboard Chair Peter Berger confirmed this. Duane Cook expressed concern asking if this would be a liability issue. Selectboard Member Catherine McGrath joined in on the discussion explaining that as part of the Better Connection Grant the public was asked what they would like to see happen and it was to slow down the traffic on Route 5. Being that most activities happen on this side of Town including the FCA summer concerts the side walks and crosswalks will add extra safety for pedestrians during these times. Discussion ensued on Route 5 safety, sidewalk upkeep, and Fairlee's old sidewalk system. Robert Metzler asked if the new crosswalks would have flashing signs. Selectboard Chair Peter Berger confirmed they would. Thomas Hough added that the Town has been transparent with this issue and now was not the time when we have to pay for it, to suddenly decide it was not a good idea. Being there was no more discussion, the question was called. The motion carried. Article 6 passed in the affirmative.

Article 7. To raise such sum of money as may appear necessary for the Maintenance and Improvements of the Town Highways for the ensuing year, and to authorize collection of same by the Town Treasurer under 32 VSA 4791. Property taxes shall be billed on or before September 1, 2023, and shall be due and payable on or before October 2, 2023. Interest shall be at a rate allowed by law and shall be payable on all past due taxes.

Elizabeth Wilson made the motion that the Town raise by taxes the amount of \$237,397.00 for the Maintenance and Improvements of the Town Highways. The motion was seconded. Article 7 was opened for discussion. Larry Martin requested a vote by paper ballot. After some clarification he withdrew his request. There was no other discussion. The question was called. The motion carried. Article 7 passed in the affirmative.

Article 8. Shall the voters of the Town of Fairlee appropriate the following sums to undertake and save for capital improvements within the Town in accordance with the Capital Budget and Program adopted by the Selectboard? All sums have been included in the Town Budget. A sum not to exceed:

- |                                     |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| a) Town Buildings and Lands Reserve | \$ 96,573.00 |
| b) Emergency Equipment Reserves     | \$ 20,000.00 |
| c) Town Highway Reserve             | \$130,000.00 |
| d) Lake Reserve                     | \$ 28,500.00 |

Elizabeth Wilson made the motion to move Article 8. The motion was seconded. Article 8 was opened for discussion. David Adams in looking for clarification, asked if the reserve funds accumulated year after year. Treasurer Lisa Hinsley explained they do. She directed the voters to the capital budgets in the Town Report and encouraged voters to go to the Town website to review the 10 year Capital Plan. She explained that the Capital Budget was set up in 2018-2019 with help from Two Rivers Ottawaquechee and that the Town has been adding funds every year.

Dashiell Rae indicated there had been some discussion about \$15,000.00 to purchase a UTV (Utility Task Vehicle) under the Emergency Equipment Reserve fund. She asked if this was still where the money was

going to be spent and if so, she would like to put forward that a battery-operated drone would be a much better allocation of our funds as opposed to a UTV. She added that a drone would find a person if they were lost in the forest. Selectboard Member Catherine McGrath confirmed that the UTV is still in the Capital Budget. Discussion ensued on this budget allocation and drone capability versus a UTV. Selectboard Member Catherine McGrath explained that our definition of a capital expense is \$10,000.00 or more. If the drone is less than \$10,000.00 it can't come out of the Capital Budget. She went on to explain that there were many conversations about the UTV with a lot of people attending Selectboard meeting and with the Budget Committee which is why it is still in the Capital Budget. She continued to explain that the \$15,000.00 is not the full expense for the kind of UTV we need to rescue people. She added that this was an estimate for half the price and the other half would be paid with a grant. Treasurer Lisa Hinsley asked that Ross Cannon be heard since the request came through him. Fast Squad Member Ross Cannon explained that the request came from the Fast Squad and Fire Department to increase their rescue capability in our outdoor recreational space. He added, hearing information about a drone was good and they could take it into account, but it would come out of their operational budget if they choose to go down that road. He went on to add that having a drone find someone is great, but it would not equip us to retrieve someone and do any medical procedures. The UTV will also extend our ability to fight wildfires in our forest or rural areas. He ended by explaining that this is an overall comprehensive act to increase the ability for the Fire Department and the Fast Squad even though there are other mutual aid resources that we can call upon, Fairlee needs to be able to respond to our own emergencies. Thomas Hough repeated that the Capital Budget is for expenses of \$10,000.00 or more and that a drone would need to come out of an operating budget. Dan Ludwig explained that the UTV is not only for lake or wilderness rescue, we have some very bad roads like Bald Top Rd and one driveway on Terry Hill Rd that are not accessible in bad weather with our fire department equipment, but a UTV with chains on it, could get someone out. He explained how we lost Aya Itagaki when she had her stroke lived on a very bad driveway, adding, it would have been accessible with a UTV with chains on. There was no more discussion. The question was called. The motion carried. Article 8 passed in the affirmative.

Article 9. To act upon the recommendations of the Budget Committee as they pertain to Town Expenditures and to appropriate a sum of money for Town Expenses.

Elizabeth Wilson made that the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,259,902.00. Clyde Blake made the motion to add \$8,000.00 for fireworks. Jeff Soyer asked to comment and impressed his support for the fireworks stating just as our parade is part of our 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration so are the fireworks. He added that it did not matter if you were 70 years old or 7 years old everyone loves the fireworks. He explained that it was the second largest show in Vermont behind Burlington and that the Lake Morey Resort has for years been generously funding a large part of the fireworks. He added that the resort brings a lot of business to town and the fireworks bring in over 1000 people from the region. He ended by explaining the cost of fireworks in the budget was about a dollar a month in taxes for something that is live, exciting, and you can spread a blanket out on the grass and encouraged the voters to put this back in the budget. He was given a round of applause. Budget Committee Member Dan Ludwig explained when the Budget Committee held their hearing, there was a lot of concern about the budget increase, the Budget Committee did not take a position on this, but reported back to the Selectboard Board that there were several people at the hearing that requested the fireworks be removed from the budget. He continued to explain that the Budget Committee is supposed to report back to the Selectboard, and his impression was they decided to leave it up to the voters. He added that he did not think anyone wanted to cut this, it was just a practical way to respond, and he invited the voters to come to the Budget Hearing next year.

Elizabeth Wilson agreed with what Dan Ludwig said and added that the Budget Committee Members did not personally want to remove the fireworks, but their job is to relay what they hear. She continued explaining that the beach funding was discussed at the Budget Hearing. She added that her thought was that the beach would have been recommended to cut over the fireworks, but a lot of people wanted the beach to be funded. Treasurer Lisa Hinsley explained if we add back in the \$8,000.00 specifically for fireworks, we are looking at a .0038 cent increase, if you own a \$250,000.00 home in Fairlee, it will be an increase of \$9.50 on your tax bill. Selectboard Chair Peter Berger clarified that the \$8,000.00 is only the

Town's portion of what the fireworks cost, the full amount is \$12,000.00. He explained during the budget process there was no guarantee that the Selectboard would know if that figure was there. When the original budget was presented from the departments, it was in the range of a 13-14% increase, currently we are down to 9%. He added that it was a realization of the Selectboard that we needed to look for places to take money off of the budget. He explained there was no intent specifically against the 4<sup>th</sup> of July or the fireworks, it was only an overall budgetary move by the Selectboard to be fiscally responsible. He also explained that adding in the \$8,000.00 would not necessarily guarantee that we are going to have fireworks, but we are certainly going to work on this. Lynn Fitzhugh made the motion to amend Article 9 and add in \$8,000.00 for fireworks. The motion was seconded. There was no more discussion. The motion carried. The amendment to Article 9 passed in the affirmative. Elizabeth Wilson made the motion that the Town appropriate the sum of \$1,267,902.00. The motion was seconded. The motion carried. Article 9 passed in the affirmative as amended.

Article 10. To raise such sum of money as may appear necessary for Town Expenses and Indebtedness for the ensuing year and to authorize collection of same by the Town Treasurer per 32 VSA 4791. Property taxes shall be billed on or before September 1, 2023, and shall be due and payable on or before October 2, 2023. Interest shall be at a rate allowed by law and shall be payable on all past due taxes.

Elizabeth Wilson made the motion for the Town to raise by taxes the amount of \$949,505.00. The motion was seconded. Article 10 was opened for discussion. There was no discussion. The question was called. The motion carried. Article 10 passed in the affirmative.

Article 11. To transact any other proper Town business that may come before this meeting.

Clyde Blake asked voters to turn to page 44 of the Town Report pointing out the delinquent tax column. He asked that the Town support those with delinquent taxes so they can stay in Town. Treasurer Lisa Hinsley explained that while it looks like a large number in this delinquent tax column, our delinquent taxes this last year, were the lowest they have been in many years, when you look at the percentage of the overall taxes collected. She added it looks like a large number, but if you think about the fact that we collected over 5 million dollars, \$75,000.00 is low. She explained that there are programs available that did help taxpayers pay their taxes and Jason Bachus our Delinquent Tax Collector is very effective and helpful.

Selectboard Chair Peter Berger first updated the voters on the interim bylaws process. In the last year the Selectboard, Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator have been working to update the bylaws to be representative of the need to ensure water quality on Lake Morey. The Planning Commission has had their hearing and the Selectboard will have their hearing soon. He went on to explain that there are important changes in the bylaw that will affect a lot of people and the Selectboard hope the voters will support these changes when it comes to a vote. He continued his updated the voters regarding the work on significant cyanobacteria bloom on Lake Morey that happened last year. Within a few weeks of the bloom, they negotiated with the contractor Solitude to do a feasibility study that was accepted by the State. They then met on February 14<sup>th</sup> with DEC and Clean Water, the objective being to work with the State to have an \$800,000.00 Alum Treatment at no cost to the Town. He added that the relationship with the State has been successful, and things are moving ahead thanks to the work Tad Nunez, our Town Administrator, has done in writing the requests for the revolving loan funds and grants. We are now on the State's list as a priority project. He added that it is important for everyone to be aware that the Town is moving as quickly as possible to resolve this. He also explained how the timeline in the 1980's for the Alum Treatment took 5 years and this time we hope to have treatment this summer. Horace Palmer III asked if Lake Fairlee had this same problem. Selectboard Chair Peter Berger responded at this point it does not and that DEC Lake and Ponds are doing watershed studies on Lake Fairlee and Lake Morey to collect more data.

Selectboard Member Catherine McGrath recognized and thanked former Police Chief Jason Bachus for his service. A round of applause was given to him. Jason Bachus addressed the voters thanking all and stating it's been a good 10 years. He explained how former Police Chief Leon Marsh, Jr. recommended him for Town Constable and Chief of Police which he was more than happy to except since he was a resident at the time. He explained that he took a full time job over in Orford NH and that it took a lot more effort than he was expecting. He added that working 48-55+ hours over there wasn't allowing him to adequately perform the duties that Fairlee deserves. He explained they tried supplemental contracts with the Orange County Sheriff's Department and the Vermont State Police, but due to the problems in the Sheriff's Department he felt it was an opportune time to bring law enforcement home to Fairlee where it belongs. He introduced Wayne Briggs as the new Chief of Police, who came from the Orange County Sheriff's Department. He stated he is very confident in Chief Briggs abilities and the hours he will be able to provide the taxpayers in Fairlee, is just where the Town needs to be at this point.

Selectboard Chair Peter Berger recognized Moderator Bruce Taylor for his 25 years of service as our Town Moderator and presented him with a plaque. A standing ovation was given to him in heartfelt appreciation. Moderator Bruce Taylor began by saying 25 years goes by in a hurry when you're having fun. He added that it's been his privilege and an honor to serve the Town of Fairlee for that long and his not sure how much longer he will do it, adding, time marches on for all of us, but this year we did it. He gave a big thank you to all.

Moderator Bruce Taylor gave a last tribute to the people who have lived with us in service and worked within the Town. He asked that we remember them as he read the list of those deceased in the Town Report adding James O'Donnell who just recently passed away. There was a moment of silence in remembrance.

Being there was no other business before this meeting, Moderator Bruce Taylor declared the 2023 Town Meeting adjourned at 11:15am.

Attest: Georgette Wolf-Ludwig, CVC/MMC  
Fairlee Town Clerk

Pending Approval